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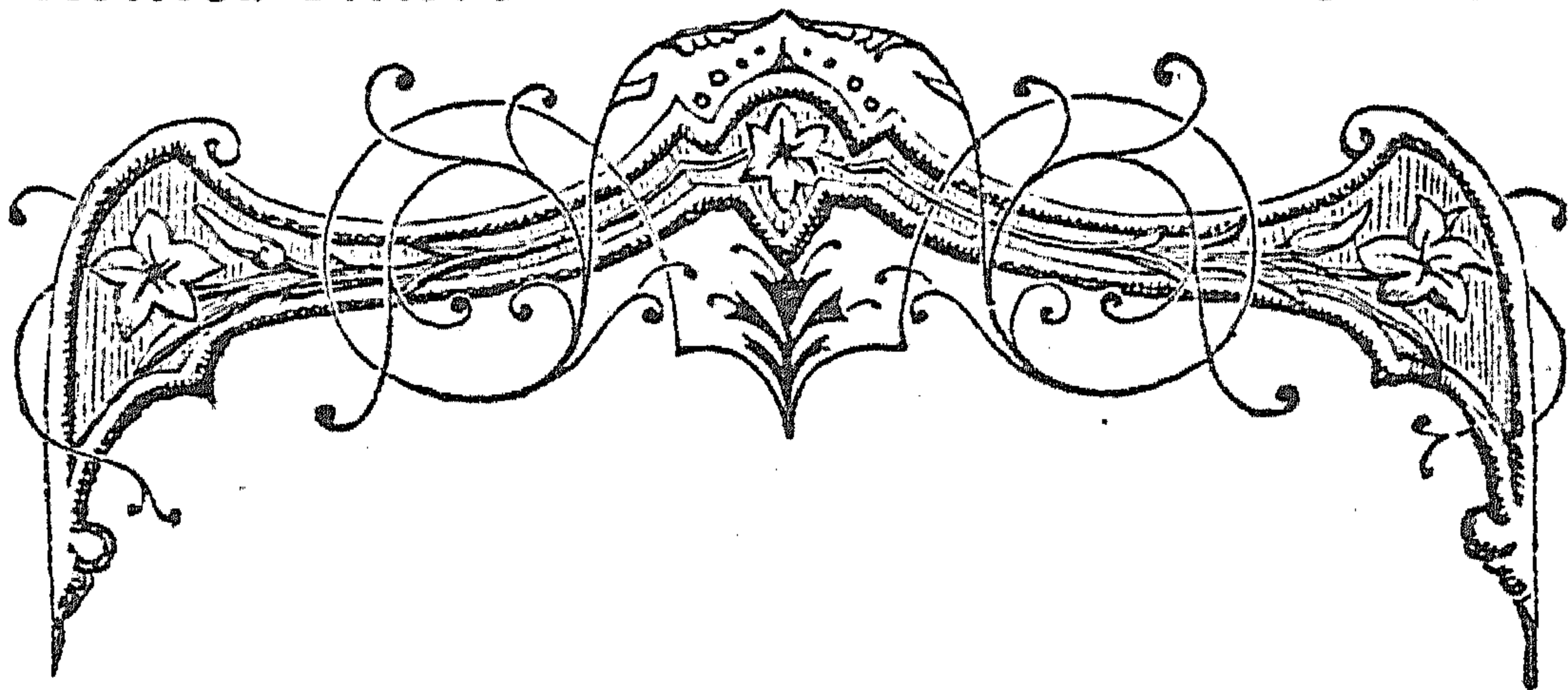
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[No. 78.]



HAVE YOU TRULY REPENTED?

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A TRACT AND A READER.

BY REV. W. S. PLUMER, D.D.

Tract. FRIEND, I am a perishable piece of paper. I am entirely in your power. If you will, you can tear me to pieces, or cast me into the fire. My existence is, if possible, more precarious than your own. I can neither annoy nor profit you beyond your permission. If you choose you can lay me aside, and our acquaintance shall cease. But if you will consent, I will speak to you of things weighty and eternal. Have you truly repented?

Reader. Have I truly repented? If a man had asked me such a question I should have insulted

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him. It is inquisitorial and impertinent. I should at least have refused to answer him, and gone away, feeling that *I* had been insulted. Nobody needs to repent but the wicked. Besides, all who do wrong, of course, repent sooner or later. But your insignificance is your protection. I will listen a little longer.

Tract. I have nothing new, or smart, or strange, or pretty to say ; nor do I promise to utter pleasant things. I prefer the useful before the clever and the amusing. I, therefore, ask again, Have you truly repented ? Be not angry with me, nor call me rude. If for my plainness you burn me, I shall not feel it. If you destroy me, that is an end of my existence. But you have a deathless soul : you will be happy or miserable forever according to your character. Have you sinned ? yes, you have sinned grievously. Your conscience declares it ; God declares it. You may have repented ; but have you truly repented ? An error here is fatal : all repentance is not genuine and saving.

Reader. I never liked metaphysics : I cannot split hairs. Repentance is repentance ; and he who repents shall be saved.

Tract. In disliking needless refinements you are not singular : all sober men do the same. But to
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reject obvious distinctions is, in worldly matters, folly, in religion, madness. Inspiration has directed the shafts of divine irony against the sottish stupidity which hath eyes, but doth not see; not discerning between the wheat and the chaff—good and evil. God says, “In understanding be men.”

Reader. You speak more sense than I expected. Will you tell me what true repentance is? You shall at least have my attention.

Tract. I will try. The true penitent is sorry chiefly for his sins. He whose repentance is spurious is sorry chiefly for the consequence of his sins. One regrets that he deserves punishment, the other, that he must suffer punishment. The former laments that he has done evil; the latter that he has incurred evil. One approves the very law which condemns him; the other thinks the same law hard and rigorous. The Scripture speaks of two kinds of repentance. One means simply regret. In this sense Herod repented when he found that his oath would end in the beheading of John. The other word means a change of mind, thorough and entire. Such was Paul's repentance, which needed not to be repented of. Besides, a true penitent is sorry for all his sins. A wicked thought, no less a wicked action, grieves him. Es-

pecially is he greatly cast down by a view of his many sins by omission.

Reader. But is there no feeling but that of sorrow in the mind of a true penitent?

Tract. Yes; he who is truly sorry is also deeply ashamed. This shame regards not merely open and disreputable crimes, but vain thoughts and evil imaginations. The blush equally as the tear becomes every sinner. To look back on the past with shame, no less than with sorrow, behooves him. If he have no cause to be ashamed before men, yet he has great cause to be ashamed before God. If we need not blush for our treatment of our fellow-creatures, yet ought we not to blush for our treatment of our God and Saviour? All true penitents do blush as well as weep. They are ashamed as well as grieved for the things they have done. On this point universal Christian experience and the word of God speak but one uniform language.

Reader. Is there any other mark by which one may know when he has truly repented?

Tract. There is. The sorrow of a true penitent draws him toward God, leading him to hope in the divine mercy. He whose repentance is spurious is always going from God. His sorrow works death.

It has the sullenness of despair; it is without hope. The more Judas repented the more wicked he was, until to his other sins he added the crying guilt of the worst kind of murder. On the other hand, the knowledge which the prodigal had of his father's character, and the hope of obtaining paternal forgiveness, kept him from throwing himself forever away.

Reader. Your words seem reasonable. Speak on.

Tract. A true penitent reforms. "He truly repents of the sins he has committed who does not commit the sins he has repented of," says Augustine. When Ephraim sincerely repented he solemnly said, "What have I to do any more with idols?" He forever renounced idolatry. He does not really confess sin who does not also forsake it. He who hates sin turns from it. It was not the habit of David's life to commit adultery and murder, though he was once guilty of both; nor of Peter's to deny his Lord, and to curse and swear, though he also was guilty of both these. A true penitent is not always sinning and repenting.

Saving repentance is also well timed. A true penitent does not defer his relentings until the fixedness of an eternal destiny hath consigned him

to hopeless sorrow. True repentance is generally early in life—always in time. Eternity affords no “place of repentance.” Even “the repentance of a dying man often dies with him,” says Augustine.

Moreover, a true penitent is increasingly sorry for his sins. The more he thinks of them, and the longer he contemplates their vile ingratitude, the more bitterly he weeps. His sorrow for sin, and his hatred of sin, grow every day; so that at the end of his life his hatred of sin and love of holiness are far stronger than in the day of his espousals to Jesus Christ. Paul never seemed so sorry for his cruel persecutions of the saints as near the close of life.

Lastly. All true repentance springs from the cross of Christ, under the influences of the Holy Spirit. Take an impenitent man to Mount Calvary, and there point him to the lingering, bleeding, dying, praying Saviour; go with him over to the sepulcher, and he remains unmoved by the remembrance of his sins. His wailings over the transgressions only commence when he comes in sight of hell. Take the true penitent to the sides of the pit, and show him the lake of fire, though he trembles and adores at the sight of the just and terrible severity of God toward the abominable and un-

believing, his eyes shed no tears over his own sins. Take him to the foot of Calvary, and his heart begins to melt. Commence the ascent of the mount with him, and the tears flow freely. Bring him in full view of the cross, and let him see whom he hath pierced, and he shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and he shall be in bitterness for him as for a first-born. Here, before the cross, his heart breaks and melts, and the gush of penitence pours forth a flood of holy tears.

The sight of Cesar's bloody robes roused the indignation of thousands against his murderers. They loudly called for vengeance. A right view of Christ crucified will make any man determine on the death of every sin.

Reader. If you have spoken truth I fear I am a lost man.

Tract. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Reader. God be merciful to me a sinner. I have sinned much, and long, and wantonly, without provocation, against light and mercy, and against my own promises. I see, too, that my repentance is not scriptural. I am afraid that I shall never be saved. My folly is surpassed only by my wicked-

ness. How I have murdered time, especially holy time. How many gracious offers I have slighted! Unless God have pity I am undone forever! O my soul, what hast thou done! Perhaps thy eternity is rueful. My only hope is, that it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. Lord, turn me, and I shall be turned. Here on my knees I humbly plead for mercy. Grant unto me, a lost sinner, salvation through thy dear Son, and I will ever ascribe all to the praise of the glory of thy grace in Christ Jesus.



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TRACT DEPARTMENT.

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